broadcast at 14 years of age. In her broadcast to the Commonwealth on reaching her majority she enunciated her frequently reiterated pledge, that the purpose of her life would be “service of our people”. She is unlikely to abdicate in favour of Charles, since she says of her position, “It’s a job for life.” As television replaced radio as the major means of communication, she has become a household icon. Her serenity and sincerity are patent, and her former severity has been cleverly moderated. She is a consummate performer, at both the individual level and as the centrepiece of pageantry. The phrase “My husband and I” must be one of the best-known identifiers in Modern history. Royal ‘occasions’ are seen by hundreds of millions of people—about 750 million in the case of the wedding of Prince Charles. Her fortieth anniversary as Queen has been celebrated modestly, by Royal standards, but her Golden Jubilee in 2002 is likely to announce the survival of the British monarchy into the 21st century in the grand manner.

Finally, however, the strength of the monarchy is also an indicator of just how all-pervasive and self-perpetuating is Britain’s class structure. The Royal Family, after all, is just the most eminent of the aristocratic families whose lineage is recorded in the stud books of the peerage. It is worth remembering that of all the aristocracies in the world in the late 18th century, the British aristocracy has done far and away the best job of surviving and retaining influence. They are the only aristocracy to have their own house of parliament, and the fact that life peers constitute about half their number these days only makes the hereditary ones more exclusive. Their wealth and social, economic and political power is considerable. Their position is strengthened by the success of their chief. But that chief, by her lifestyle and ideas, also appeals greatly to the middle class, and even to most of the working class. The simultaneous transmission and manifestation of class consciousness in education, culture, the media, work and leisure, emphasises the virtues of the existing system and its acceptance by all classes. The ‘value’ of the monarch permeates everything.

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By the 1980s, however, that tradition had already waned. The bankruptcy of ‘real, existing socialism’ had left intellectuals disillusioned with socialism in general. When the wave of nationalism broke, it carried with it a shocking proportion of the country’s academics and scholars. Today, where nationalism is the rule in every republic, opposition is mostly feeble and constructive debate is non-existent.

At the cutting edge of critical Yugoslav thought during the 1960s and 70s was the renowned Praxis school. A group of radical thinkers centred around the theoretical journal Praxis, the “Partisan professors” took Yugoslavia’s official critique of Soviet communism to heart. With academic rigour, they applied their own left Marxist critique to the rigid brand of orthodox ideology that prevailed at home in Yugoslavia.

In the pages of Praxis and at the annual Korcula Summer School, the names of Europe’s foremost radical thinkers—from Marcuse to Sartre—appeared with regularity. The Praxis group’s ideas were integral to the 1960s Yugoslav protest movement. Yet, shortly after the movement’s suppression, their own confrontation with the regime came to a head in 1975, eight of the school’s leading theorists—the so-called Belgrade 8, including Miladin Zivotic, Milhailo Markovic and Zagorka Golubovic—were expelled from their university posts and Praxis was shut down.

Today, the former consensus that united the critical theorists from Belgrade and Zagreb has dissipated. Most have backed away from their earlier radicalism. Their post-Marxist paths have led in strikingly different directions, leading some to deconstruction and post-structuralism, others to various forms of liberalism and yet others to nationalism. Nevertheless, many of the former Praxis members remain in the political fray—but now at odds with each other as well as their Marxist pasts.

Armed with liberal blueprints, one branch of the Praxis group continues the tradition of disidence from the platform of the democratic opposition in Serbia. Opposition groups such as the Serbian Democratic Party and the Yugoslav Democratic Movement find former Praxis people at the top of their leaderships.

From his office in the University of Belgrade’s philosophy department, Professor Miladin Zivotic heads Citizens’ Action for Peace. Although he distances himself from Marxism, he sees a continuity from many of the Praxis ideas to those of the liberal opposition today.

He argues that central to the Praxis project was a relentless critique of the governing ideology. Zivotic and his colleagues felt that ideology had mystified human relations to the point that the human agent lost his capacity for meaningful action. “We looked into the possibilities for the self-realisation of the human being in order to locate the possibility of self-government and radical democracy in society,” he says. From the young Marx they relied heavily on the concept of man himself as the active subject, capable of transforming himself and the world around him.
Today, Zivotic considers himself closer to the ideals of Western social democracy and identifies philosophically with contemporary French thought and German hermeneutics. "What we tried to do in the 60s was to actualise the socialist ideals that the ruling polit-bureaucracy claimed to hold in theory," he says over a stack of dissertations piled high on his desk. "Our critique of the system was always a quarrel with the family." It is that socialist family to which Zivotic no longer belongs.

First, he says, a liberal democratic culture, complete with market economy, must emerge in Yugoslavia before the ideals of the 1960s are realistic. Then, perhaps, in a few generations' time, socialism may become possible.

Social anthropologist and former member of the Belgrade 8, Zagorka Golubovic depicts Serbia's intellectuals as being in a deep identity crisis. She explains that a kind of apathy prevails today among once-critical intellectuals. "Now that socialism is out of fashion, many of the former dissidents find it difficult to readjust to the situation," she says.

In 1986, Golubovic herself was one of 200 Belgrade intellectuals who signed a petition protesting at the failure of the Yugoslav government to stop the oppression of the Serb minority in Kosovo. When Milosevic came to power one year later, it was under the pretext of that issue that he ignited Serbian nationalism.

Yet Golubovic, a long-time human rights proponent, is as staunch a critic as any of the nationalist fervor that has engulfed Yugoslavia. An independent intellectual, she claims that the critical methodology of the Praxis days remains valid today. The ideology of nationalism, for example, has telling parallels to that of orthodox communism. "Both emphasise the supra-collectivity above the individual," says the anthropologist in her sparse university office. "In communism it is the party and state that know all and to which one must pay homage. In nationalism, it is the nation."

The ideology of nationalism, according to Golubovic, is the ideology of fatalism, the opposite of marxism. "What I appreciate most about Marx is that he liberated the human agent from fatalism. He rejected the notion that one necessarily depends upon a natural or supernatural being outside of one's self. "She argues that the nation posits itself as a supernatural entity which negates man's freedom and individualism. "You are nobody except as a member of that nation. It's an ideology that pacifies people and makes them helpless unless they are part of the nation."

On the other side of the fence in Serbian politics, the Praxis oppositionists recognise some familiar and unexpected faces. The Praxis school's pre-eminent philosopher Mihailo Markovic, is vice-president of the ruling Serbian Socialist Party (SSP). To the shock of many of his former colleagues, last year Markovic signed on with the reformed version of the Praxis philosophy's arch nemesis, the orthodox League of Communists. Under its strong-arm leader, Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, the League has transformed itself into an autocratic nationalist party.

Yet Markovic claims that the SSP stands firmly in the tradition of the same socialist humanism that he has advocated since his days as a Partisan army officer. While extreme nationalism rages in Croatia and other republics, he argues, Serbia has evolved into a modern social democracy, comparable to those in northern Europe.

He feels that some of the old Praxis school have simply clung to their identity as oppositionists and changed their ideas to maintain this role. "I was a dissident for all those years because there was no socialist party in Yugoslavia," explains the grey-haired marxist in his book-lined study. "When a new party emerged that wanted to adopt our ideas, I felt that I could no longer simply sit on the sidelines."

The esteemed figure of Markovic in its ranks has been a giant boost for the SSP. His photo is regularly plastered on the front page of the SSP mouthpiece Politika and, like a good functionary, the former critic loyally toes the party line. In polemics against the ethnic Albanian population in Serbia's southern Kosovo province, he legitimises the government's gross violation of human rights. When student protesters took to the streets in March, Markovic stood by the regime's hardliners. He recently justified Serbia's refusal to accept European Community peace initiatives.

That Serbia's belligerent policies have increasingly isolated it within Europe doesn't faze Markovic. "One gets suspicious when one sees that it's Germany, Austria and Hungary that want to recognise Croatian independence," he claims. "It's the old direction of German penetration into the southeast, the drive for access to the Adriatic."

Markovic's apologetics have some of his colleagues indignant, others feeling vindicated. "Yes, philosophers in power..." sighs Zivotic, who naturally locates the root of his old friend's politics in his philosophical assumptions. Markovic, he says, had always embraced a specific kind of totalising, metaphysical marxism. "You can plug in any variable such as nation or class into such a theoretical framework, but it won't change the way of thinking. It's a closed system and the result is self-evident."

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